

Dear Rabbi Fried,

More than once I have come across Orthodox Jews who I felt looked down upon me for not being observant like them, and don't respect us as Jews. I got the impression I am not a good person in their eyes because I don't keep the rituals like they do. Do you feel they have the right to be that judgmental?

Morris P.

Dear Morris,

Unfortunately, I cannot deny that there are Jews who consider themselves orthodox who are judgmental. Their judgment, however, does not have a source in Judaism, and is, rather, their own personal problem. Judaism teaches that only G-d has the right and the ability to judge people.

There once was a very young man who became the Rebbe of a sect of Chassidim when his father died an untimely death. The elders approached him and asked how it is possible that such a young man could be the leader of those much older than himself. He answered with a parable. Two men trained for many months to climb a very high mountain. After weeks of climbing, they got to the end of their strength, and stopped to rest on a plateau. They were shocked to see a young boy playing and chasing butterflies. They asked him in amazement, how did you get here?! We spent grueling weeks to arrive at this point, and you are playing here! The boy replied, my friends, I was born here!

The point of the story is twofold. It is true, some were born into higher levels of scholarship and piety, and therefore may automatically be born into a position of leadership. However, it's clear that the ones who climbed the mountain to get to where the others were born are much higher in the eyes of G-d. They achieved it through their own efforts and toil.

It is possible that one mitzvah performed by a Jew brought up in a secular home is worth a hundred mitzvos performed by one who was born into observance.

The Talmud says that one Jew cannot kill another, even to save his own life. This applies even if you are the most pious of Jews and the other Jew is a thief, a drug addict or even a murderer. The reason, says the Talmud, is that we can never know "who's blood is redder". There is no way for mortal man to judge another and to know who is considered more dear or valuable in the eyes of G-d.

The true Torah philosophy of life is to respect every Jew for what they are, and to leave judgment to the Al-mighty.

The truth is that condescending attitudes, as they have no source in Torah, are certainly not unique to Jews or any particular sect of Jews. You can find the same attitudes, at times, with conservative to reform or reform to secular Jews. It comes from a human need to "be right". Often you can find the same attitudes from Republicans to Democrats or vice versa.

Our job is to view every Jew as a family member, and every person as one who is created in the "image of G-d", and learn what we can from everyone. This is the meaning of the sages "there is no man who doesn't have a place or a time".